



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk (860)441-6640  
Town Manager  
(860)441-6630

**Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.**

**Tuesday, October 12, 2004**

**7:00 PM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

#### **REGULAR MEETING**

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.*

#### **2. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets, Councilor Skrmetti and Councilor Wright

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.*

#### **3. Calendar and Communications**

*Mayor Watson noted that the Council will be meeting with the RTM on Wednesday, October 13th.*

*Councilor Billing will be attending the CCM Convention on October 14th.*

*Town Manager Oefinger distributed a letter of resignation/retirement from Police Chief David Vanasse effective January 3, 2005. The Manager praised Chief Vanasse for his service and stated he will be missed greatly.*

*The Town Manager suggested that if the Council would like a presentation from the school consultant selection committee that has chosen the firm of Jeter, Cook & Jepson, a special meeting could be held on October 19th. Councilor Sheets stated she is interested in affording the public an understanding of the process and criteria that guided the decision and she would like the meeting televised. All Councilors concurred.*

*Councilor Skrmetti received a call from a citizen concerned with speeding on Ocean View Avenue. The issue was referred to the Traffic Authority.*

#### **4. Approval of Minutes**

##### **2004-0284 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)**

##### **RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of September 7, 2004 (Joint Meeting with City Council) and September 14, 2004 are hereby accepted and approved.

##### **Discussed**

*Councilor Sheets stated she would like to listen to the tape of the September 14th meeting before voting. Consideration of the minutes was tabled.*

#### **5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

*None.*

#### **6. NEW BUSINESS**

##### **2003-0228 Navy Housing Privatization**

**Discussed**

*Town Attorney Andy Brand stated he would like to bring the Council up to date on this matter. The Navy has entered into an agreement with GMH to privatize Navy housing, whereby the Navy will retain ownership of the property and lease the land to an entity consisting of the Navy and GMH. The group is seeking a substantial amount of financing, and they have requested that the Assessor indicate that the property will remain tax exempt for the next 50 years. The Town is not prepared to make that statement, but the Town Attorney will prepare a letter indicating that at the present time, and based on documentation seen to date, the property is exempt from taxation as long as the Navy retains control of the project. The Town has also concluded that zoning regulations do not apply to this property. GMH is requesting the letter in order to secure financing. If the Town does not indicate that the property will not be taxed, it may diminish the amount GMH can borrow and reduce the size of the project.*

*The Town Manager explained that his concern has been the form of the request and the lack of documentation available. The letter will be written in such a way that if things change, the Town can change its position. The Town has never felt the units were subject to zoning, but there is a concern that if the partnership dissolves and the housing becomes non-military, complications could arise.*

*Attorney Brand noted that according to GMH, three other towns have entered into privatization agreements. Although GMH faxed a copy of an agreement, it does not fit the Groton situation. Councilor O'Beirne suggested that towns with privatization experience be surveyed. Town Manager Oefinger explained that he has attempted to find other communities who have gone through the process, and he is aware of privatization projects done by other branches of the military, but they have been on-base units unlike the Groton situation. Councilor O'Beirne passed around a news article regarding privatization*

**2004-0205****Route 1 (New London Road) Sidewalk Issue****Discussed**

*Mayor Watson asked if the Councilors would like to talk to the Town Attorney about the Route 1 sidewalk issue. Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent indicated that the Town Attorney does not have any additional information on the Route 1 sidewalk issue, and he continues to work on alternatives.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Billing, to enter Executive Session at 7:35 p.m. to discuss 2004-0205 Route 1 (New London Road) Sidewalk Issue under Consideration of Committee Referral Items on the agenda, and to invite Town Attorney Andy Brand and Town Manager Mark Oefinger to attend.**

**The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Votes:** In Favor: 6 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Sheets, Councilor Skrmetti and Councilor Wright  
Opposed: 3 - Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Kolnaski and Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

*The executive session concluded at 7:41 p.m.*

**2004-0281****Groton Community Events Fund****Recommended for a Resolution**

*Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo noted this is a two-part request. First, although the Town Council appropriated \$25,000 to this fund, the transfer from the General Fund was never made so Mr. Pandolfo is requesting a transfer from General Contingency. The second request is to increase the funding to \$43,000, with the difference coming from this fund's fund balance.*

*Councilor Billing spoke with Duncan Stoddard, who indicated they would not need any additional funds because they would be doing fundraising. The Town Manager explained that the funds have*

*been set aside for this purpose, but they haven't been authorized for expenditure. Mr. Stoddard is indicating that the funds that have already been set aside are sufficient.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Skrmetti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

**The motion carried unanimously.**

**2000-0271**

**Groton 300th Birthday**

**Referred**

*Councilor Billing asked that the Tercentennial referral be transferred to Committee of the Whole where the majority of discussion on the item takes place, and the Mayor agreed.*

**2004-0288**

**2005 Revaluation - Update**

**Discussed**

*Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo stated that based on the Council's direction, his office has been pursuing a statistical revaluation in 2005. They have revised the Request for Proposal (RFP) and expect to receive RFPs in November, award the contract, and start the project in January. Mr. Pandolfo indicated that the Assessor's Office does not have time to do this project in-house for 2005.*

*Councilor Wright asked if the Assessor is familiar with the criteria used in CAMA and John Philip stated yes. Mr. Philip noted that Norwalk did an in-house revaluation, but with a much larger staff. Groton would need more staff to do a statistical revaluation in-house.*

*Councilor Skrmetti feels that it needs to be stressed to staff and the chosen revaluation firm that adequate explanations must be made to the public and a contact person made available to address citizens concerns.*

*Councilor Wright asked if the statistical revaluation will use the same neighborhood groupings as the last revaluation. Mr. Philip indicated that the same neighborhoods will be used; the only difference between a statistical revaluation and a physical revaluation is that buildings are not measured in the field. Still, the process will include looking at the existing neighborhoods and sales to see if they work. Mr. Philip explained the methodology used, noting that the process does not involve direct comparable sales like an appraisal does.*

*Councilor Sheets asked if the Assessor had done an analysis of the complaints filed after the last revaluation by part of town, magnitude, numbers, etc. to determine patterns or identify factors. Mr. Philip stated that he tracks all sales, which is the main indicator of the success of a revaluation. When the revaluation was first done, complaints were analyzed and changes made to whole areas. Once that occurred and the complaints moved to the Board of Assessment Appeals, properties were reviewed individually. During a statistical revaluation, the Town starts with the old physical description and neighborhood breakdowns, and then takes a new set of sales and retabulates everything. Mr. Philip further stated that his analysis is ongoing. He knows where the impact of the statistical revaluation will be and he warned that it will be as dramatic as last time.*

*Discussion followed on statutory time limits and notifications. Councilor Billing suggested that there is a misunderstanding about the relationship between increases in property values and increases in taxes that needs to be explained to the public as early as possible.*

*Mr. Pandolfo indicated the anticipated cost of the revaluation is \$310,000.*

**2004-0289**

**Reauthorization of Funding and Authorization of Additional Funding for Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade**

**A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

The motion carried unanimously.

2003-0054

**Reorganization and Consolidation of Town and Board of Education Services**

Discussed

*Town Manager Oefinger stated this item is for discussion and direction as to whether or not the Council wants to meet with the Board of Education prior to the start of the budget process. The Mayor asked staff to schedule a special meeting with the Board of Education on a Monday night. Councilor Billing would also like to follow up on the health insurance issue and other issues. Councilors were asked to forward items for discussion to the Town Manager.*

2003-0167

**Watrous Property as open Space**

Discussed

*This item was referred to the Conservation Commission after proposed deletion of the referral. Councilor Sheets noted the Conservation Commission still has an interest in acquiring the property, but there are development approvals in place, albeit under appeal. Councilor Sheets suggested the referral be retained to wait and see what happens with the appeal. Councilor Wright concurred.*

2004-0184

**Establishment of Charter Revision Committee**

Discussed

*Councilor O'Beirne expressed the opinion that the Town is long overdue for a charter revision. Councilor Skrmetti concurred. Councilor Wright expressed concern that once a committee is established, their review cannot be limited and the entire document is subject to revision, and there are other priorities in Town right now. Councilor O'Beirne agreed that the Committee will review the entire document, but the Council does have an opportunity to comment and request changes to any proposed revisions, as well as refuse to send it to referendum vote.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., seconded by Councilor Skrmetti, to direct staff to prepare a formal resolution to allow the Council to vote on whether to establish a Charter Revision Committee.**

**Councilor Billing expressed concern with finding enough people to devote time and energy to this effort. Councilor Skrmetti feels it is this Council's responsibility. Councilor Sheets agreed with Councilors Wright and Billing and does not see an urgent need since the document is working. Councilor O'Beirne noted there has never been a problem staffing a Charter Revision Committee in the past. Previous Charter Revision Committees have already done quite a bit of work that can be used as a starting point. Councilor Wright feels that charter revision is a lot of work and in the past, it has raised divisive issues. She suggested that the secession discussion is divisive enough. She stated that the anachronisms in the Charter are well known and an addendum identifying those areas could be issued instead of revising the Charter.**

**The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Votes:** In Favor: 5 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Skrmetti

Opposed: 4 - Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright

2004-0207

**Town Manager Annual Evaluation**

Not Discussed

**7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List**

*None.*

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

*Councilor O'Beirne requested copies of the Board of Education policies regarding racial balancing and transferring of funds between budget line items for the Council.*

9. ADJOURNMENT

*A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Mayor Watson, to adjourn at 8:30 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*